

# B&W 600 S3

**MULTICHANNEL PACKAGE:** DM602 S3/DM601 S3/LCR 600 S3  
**SOUND** ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£899.85**

**STEREO PAIR:** DM602 S3  
**SOUND** ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£299.95**

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**T**he dominant force in specialist hi-fi loudspeakers today, B&W has serious quality speakers to fill any market niche you care to think up, and a few more besides. But when I started unpacking these new Series 3 600s, it felt a bit like welcoming a family of old friends.

The 600s have been B&W's bedrock budget range for more years than I care to remember, and usually drop by in pairs every two or three years. This time I seem to have got half the family at once, with a pair of large standmount DM602 S3s for the front left/right, an even more substantial LCR600 S3 for the centre, and the smaller (but by no means miniature) DM601 S3s for the rear.

The familiarity was all the stronger because my well-run-in set came in traditional black ash woodprint, which is still popular in some territories. The photographer, lucky chap, got to play with the new light oak Sorrento finish, which is much closer to current British tastes, and a major reason for evolving the new Series 3 range.

The DM602's heritage goes back more than twenty years. When it first appeared, this stereotypical 20-litre standmount looked attractively compact; in today's company it looks decidedly bulky. Since the laws of acoustics have remained unchanged, this is basically a reflection of how fashion has driven the speaker marketplace, for good or ill.

Whatever, this generous two-way has a good size main driver with cast frame and 140mm diameter Kevlar cone, plus B&W's tube-loaded 25mm metal dome tweeter. No-one would describe it as stylish, but then that's not really the point. The purpose is to offer the best sound quality for the money, and the shape is determined by the single and relatively large main driver.

The DM601 S3 is similar only smaller, roughly 14 litres in enclosure volume, and has, over the long haul,

probably been Britain's most popular hi-fi speaker. It has a correspondingly smaller main driver, again with a cast frame but using a Kevlar cone 118mm in diameter.

The same main driver crops up in the LCR600 S3 centre speaker, only here there are two, one as a bass/mid unit, and the other just to reinforce the bass end, and both with shielded magnets. I was a great fan of this model's LCR6 predecessor (*HFC198*), but the fact that it's the bulkiest and heaviest of our centre speakers by a significant margin, and pricey too at £350, might put some people off, so B&W has introduced a smaller, lighter LCR60 at £200.

Although the LCR600 S3 looks a bit pricey at £350, and helps take the system up to £900 in total, I doubt anyone will cavil at the £250 asked for the pair of DM601 S3s, or the £300 for the pair of DM602 S3s, as each has a reassuring solidity. Just bear in mind you'll need stands to support both of these. All the S3s have twin terminal pairs, and all have reflex-ported enclosures, but are also supplied with port-blocking bungs – handy if you need to place them close to walls, for example.

Even though it's a standmount, the

DM602's bass extension can match most floorstanders. All three models have good extension, and can therefore be designated 'large', though try using the supplied bungs to block the 601 ports if you're using them near a wall. The LCR centre speaker makes a pretty good balance match with the DM602.

## CONCLUSION

Large standmount speakers are not the most fashionable format around these days (especially in the black finish version), but this B&W combo unquestionably delivers the sonic goods in both stereo and multichannel modes. Decent-size, high-quality main drivers mounted in compact standmount enclosures still make plenty of sense, whatever the prevailing trends.

## MULTICHANNEL SOUND QUALITY

The good stereo balance carried through into the multichannel tests, the combination of all three B&W models creating a convincing all round coherence. No other system was more successful at creating the warm and cuddly envelopment of the whole musical event, and experiencing this combination made a strong justification for the benefits of surround sound music.

The good size centre and surround speakers made a worthwhile contribution towards building up the wraparound soundfield, while the meaty DM602s at the front delivered weight and drama with little obvious contribution from additional box colorations.

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## TWO-CHANNEL SOUND QUALITY

Despite its modest price, the DM602 S3 came close to the top in the unsighted stereo listening tests, impressing particularly with its scale and authority. 'Very low distortion, clean, effortless and detailed without being tiring' was one panellist's reaction. 'Robust. Paints a big, colourful picture/soundstage. Easygoing, lots of headroom; gets into the groove' said another.

Criticisms were minor. Presence is a little restrained and reserved, which slightly suppresses fine detail and expression, and the treble is also just a tad exposed, but not to the point where the sound becomes harsh or aggressive. One listener felt the speaker was holding back a little, delivering the verdict: 'Nearly very good'.